

RUDRA



NITYANANDA INSTITUTE

The Nityananda Institute, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, is a non-profit center dedicated to the active practice of a spiritual life. Named for the Indian saint who is its wellspring and inspiration, the Institute is under the direction of Swami Chetanananda, an American spiritual master in the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. The presence of this living teacher and the opportunity for sustained contact with him gives the Institute its unique character. The Institute sponsors many programs, ranging from a full residential program to quarterly retreat weekends, lectures, and courses in hatha yoga. The heart of the practice is the daily kundalini yoga meditation program in Portland which is open to occasional and regular visitors alike, after completion of the Introductory Program. The Institute produces a variety of thoughtful, instructional products: books, audios, and videos in the areas of health and lifestyles, yoga, meditation, and Kashmir Shaivite philosophy.

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The Nityananda Institute® logo is styled after a photograph of the young Nityananda, c 1930.

RUDRA

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FRONT COVER:

Swamiji with David and Phyllis Rudolph
at the consecration of Rudi's shrine, October 24, 1993.
Photograph by Barry Kaplan

BACK COVER:

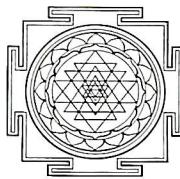
Swamiji presiding at the Homam ceremony, October 24, 1993
Photograph by Barry Kaplan

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

With this commemorative issue of *Rudra* we are celebrating the culmination of a dream that has led the Institute community from Indiana, to Massachusetts, and finally to the new Ashram in Portland, Oregon. Swamiji, who is ordinarily not particularly interested in rituals, provided us with an unforgettable inaugural weekend on October 23 and 24 to mark this important transition in the life of the Ashram. He invited five Brahmin priests to perform ceremonies to install the life force into every part of the Ashram.

Honoring Our Past and Future, the lead article by Swamiji, offers his special perspective on the inaugural ceremonies. He also addresses the Ashram's future and ways to develop new directions for the capabilities that arise from our spiritual work. The dedication of Rudi's shrine on Sunday, October 24, was the central focus and turning point for the whole weekend. Swamiji began the day's ceremonies with a talk filled with devotion to his guru which ended by his officially opening the Rudrananda Ashram. We include his words as the centerpiece of this issue.

For the account of the ceremonies, Diane Asay interviews Usha Raji and Chandrakant Khetani, friends of the Institute in Los Angeles who worked tirelessly with the Balaji Temple staff making arrangements for the priests and the materials they needed, and Karen Jones captures the memory of the inaugural concert in the new meditation hall by Ali Akbar Khan, one of the world's most revered musicians.

In keeping with the central theme, honoring our past and future, we also include a couple of articles featuring the remarkable process of the move to Portland and the miracle that took the form of N.I. Builders, a group with boundless capacity for work and good cheer. The final article describes a recent visit from Sree Chakravarti, a gifted healer from New Delhi and the Ashram's first official guest. Sree's autobiography, *A Healer's Journey*, was recently published by Rudra Press.

The inaugural weekend was an occasion filled with depth, richness, and joy in which we came together as a community to honor our teachers and recommit ourselves to carry the gift of their work into the future. This issue of *Rudra* is dedicated to Swamiji, Rudi, Nityananda, and the lineage of which we are all enormously fortunate to be a part.

Joan Ames

Lineage is the flow of grace that
transcends time and space

NITYANANDA

Nityananda lived in southwest India from the late 1800s to 1961. Over the years, he attracted thousands to the remote jungle village of Ganeshpuri. Why did they come? Certainly not because it was easy, since conditions were harshly primitive, and Nityananda rarely spoke. They came simply to be in his presence, and they were satisfied. Such a holy man is called an *avadhut* in Sanskrit - a living miracle of pure consciousness in human form. Timeless and eternal, the *avadhut* is a direct link to the Absolute, containing all teachers who went before him and all who follow. The grace of the *avadhut* Nityananda flows in our lineage.

RUDI

Born in Brooklyn in 1928, Rudi had long been actively pursuing spiritual development when he went to India in 1958 and met Nityananda in Ganeshpuri. Rudi immediately established a powerful connection with Nityananda and remained a close disciple until Nityananda's passing in 1961. In 1966 Swami Muktananda recognized Rudi as a Swami and gave him the spiritual name Rudrananda. As such, Rudi was one of the first Americans to be accepted into the Indian Saraswati Order of monks. In 1970 Swami Muktananda came to the United States to officially open the Rudrananda ashrams. As a spiritual teacher, Rudi was a powerful fusion of East and West dedicated only to spiritual growth and transcendence.

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Swami Chetanananda is an American meditation master who combines a contemporary Western perspective with a deeply transcendent understanding of the Eastern philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. Swamiji, as Chetanananda is called, was born and educated in the Midwest. He was a close disciple and spiritual teacher under Swami Rudrananda and established many ashrams in the Midwest and West Coast on Rudi's behalf. Shortly before Rudi passed away in 1973, he appointed Swamiji as his successor. Swamiji was initiated into the Saraswati Order of Monks in 1978 in Ganeshpuri, India, with Swami Muktananda presiding. The opportunity for an immediate, personal relationship with a true teacher is a rare treasure. Swamiji provides the living link to the timeless lineage that flows through Nityananda and Rudi.

Honoring Our Past and Future

SWAMI CHETANANANDA



In a recent talk with Institute members about the Vedic ceremonies inaugurating the new Rudrananda Ashram and Nityananda Institute, Swamiji offers some personal thoughts about the event and his hopes for the future.

Although I know I'm in danger of repeating myself, this is a very special place we've put together, and the inauguration ceremonies mark a very important transition for the Ashram. I want to say a few words about the background and meaning of this whole event, the idea for which goes way back.

As you know, we have been looking for the right place for us to settle in for a long time now, and all along I have wanted to celebrate the finding of such a place with some kind of ceremony. To that end, I talked years ago to Ali Akbar Khan about his playing a concert for this ceremony when the time came.

Once we arrived in Portland and I saw that we would be able to complete our building, we began to plan these ceremonies as a way to acknowledge and celebrate together this huge transition in our lives. I also wanted it to be a time to honor our teachers as well as our past and our future.

The installation of Rudi's shrine was obviously one of the ways we honor our past; the *prana patishta* ceremony with the statue of Nityananda was yet another. The fire ceremonies—the various pujas that were conducted—were a way to honor our future by recognizing the potential embedded in this change we have made. For those of us who worked so hard to get everything ready, it was a wonderful moment to stop

and reflect on what we have accomplished and on where we are going—to have a sense of gratitude for what got us here and for what will sustain us in the years ahead. These things are really the core of these ceremonies.

Probably the most important event of the weekend was the installing of Rudi's presence in the shrine. Although we had done this already on other occasions, I was never fully satisfied. In thinking about how to bring the appropriate dignity to the event, my mind gravitated to the idea of having priests from India perform the ceremony, because that would both save us from reinventing the wheel and be an acknowledgment of the Indian roots of our practice. I knew that the priests actually have such ceremonies in their repertoire, ceremonies with which I was familiar from my own *sannyas*. Once I made the decision to bring in the priests to perform the ceremony at the shrine, it was a simple thing to include the other ceremonies in which I was interested.

On Friday night we began with the *shri chakra puja*. The *shri chakra* used in this ritual is a gold object that is a combination of squares, circles, and triangles. It is first of all a visual representation of the structure of the entire universe. Second, since ancient times in India, the *shri chakra* has been the primary focus in the daily rituals of the beginning practitioner of kundalini yoga. It

is also the primary and highest representation in Hindu iconography of the creative energy of Life itself. The gold *shri chakra* used for the ceremony Friday night is one I received some years ago while performing a ceremony at an important Shakti temple in South India.

I also want to point out that the timing of this ceremony is significant. Worship of the *shri chakra* is most important during a period of holy days in India known as "Navaratri." This celebration takes the form of worshipping the different feminine deities who are all expressions of kundalini. During these special days the celebration of the creative energy of life is in full swing. It seemed particularly appropriate and auspicious for us to perform the *shri chakra puja* not only during Navaratri, but on the exact day when it is traditionally performed in India. That was a wonderful way for the weekend to begin.

In 1980, I performed the *prana patishta* ceremony for the Nityananda statue in Muktananda's Ashram at South Fallsburg, New York. So, I was also familiar with that ceremony and thought it would be both beautiful and interesting to include. The *prana patishta* includes a series of rituals intended to invoke Nityananda's state of being and to install that energy field in the statue through the use of mantras and various ritual actions—in other words, to enliven the statue with the breath (*prana*).

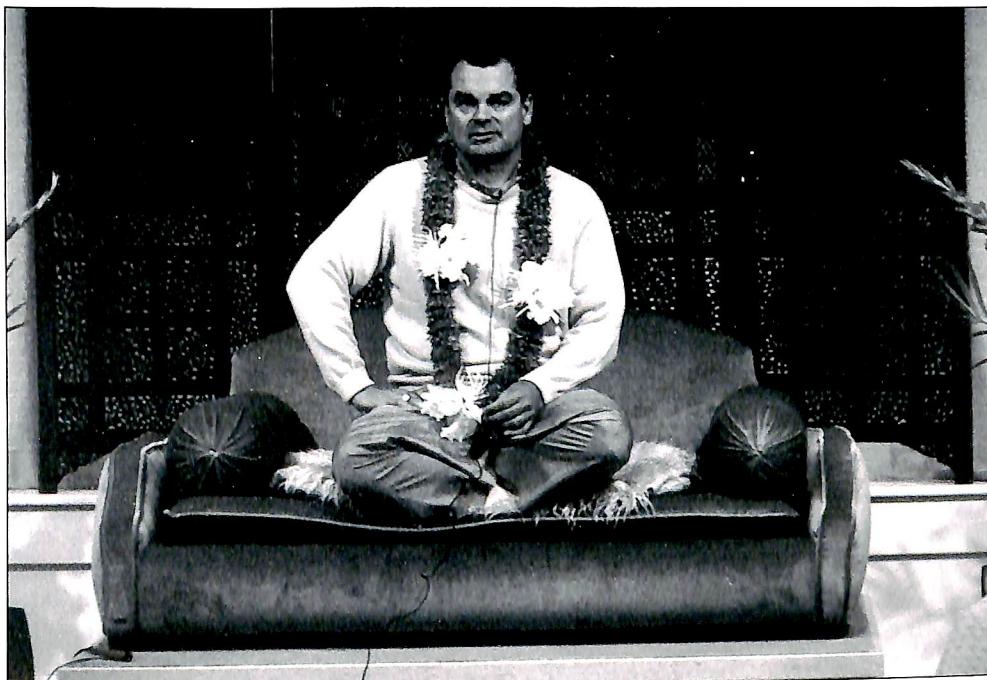
More importantly, we can think of it as a way of honoring Nityananda, of paying our respects to the profound spiritual work he did which still influences our lives.

Just as these different ceremonies celebrated our past, we celebrated our future with a large fire ceremony called a *homam*, in which pounds of clarified butter, sesame and mustard seeds, and sugar were offered into a fire, while the priests chanted certain mantras. Their idea of what they were doing was to invoke the presence of the deities to manifest heaven on earth, at least for the period of time that the ritual was carried out. Traditionally, the idea was to talk directly to God and ask for what you needed to make this a wonderful place. So, the *homam* was a way of inviting God into the environment, of intensifying the divine presence throughout the whole field of our lives.

This field or environment that we are working to create here should give us the space and the ease of movement in our daily lives to allow us to be more thoughtful about what we're doing. It should also allow us to further develop our spiritual practice. Both of these things are first on my list. The compression in our daily lives that came from a lack of space in Cambridge affected everyone. Our new space will make it possible for everyone to be more observant of themselves and of their interactions with other people, to come to a deeper understanding of what their practice is about, and to reflect on the role it plays in their development.

There was something sacred about the weekend of ceremonies, and even in the

midst of our daily lives it's important to remember that we really do live in a sacred space. If you have been brought up Catholic like I was, you may confuse the words "sacred" and "solemn." Sacred is not particularly solemn. It is particularly deep, and particularly rich, and for the most part it is joyous. But it is definitely a dimension of our lives that requires attention. As we find that more and more of the joy in our lives comes from our contact with this different, sacred dimension, our individual struggles and difficulties will have less hold over us.



PATRICIA SLOTE

In looking to and honoring our future, we also want to develop a lot more carefully and thoughtfully the articulation of our practice and the ramifications of that self-discovery process in our ordinary daily lives. What are the social and cultural implications of the insights that deeply spiritual people have about themselves and about life? We would like to develop an educational program that helps us to better articulate that understanding in the world.

This kind of program would involve issues that we have been talking about for some time now, for instance, the different dimensions of systemic thinking. How do people who view themselves as a system and their individual lives as part of a larger whole understand the world differently

from people who see themselves as completely unique, separate, individualized, and in competition? The shift from the latter understanding to the former has profound implications for change in human understanding and behavior.

I imagine, for example, that we might try to develop some kind of think tank—an event where people would study the potential for successful social systems and cultural developments that might exist in a society based on a different conception of human life.

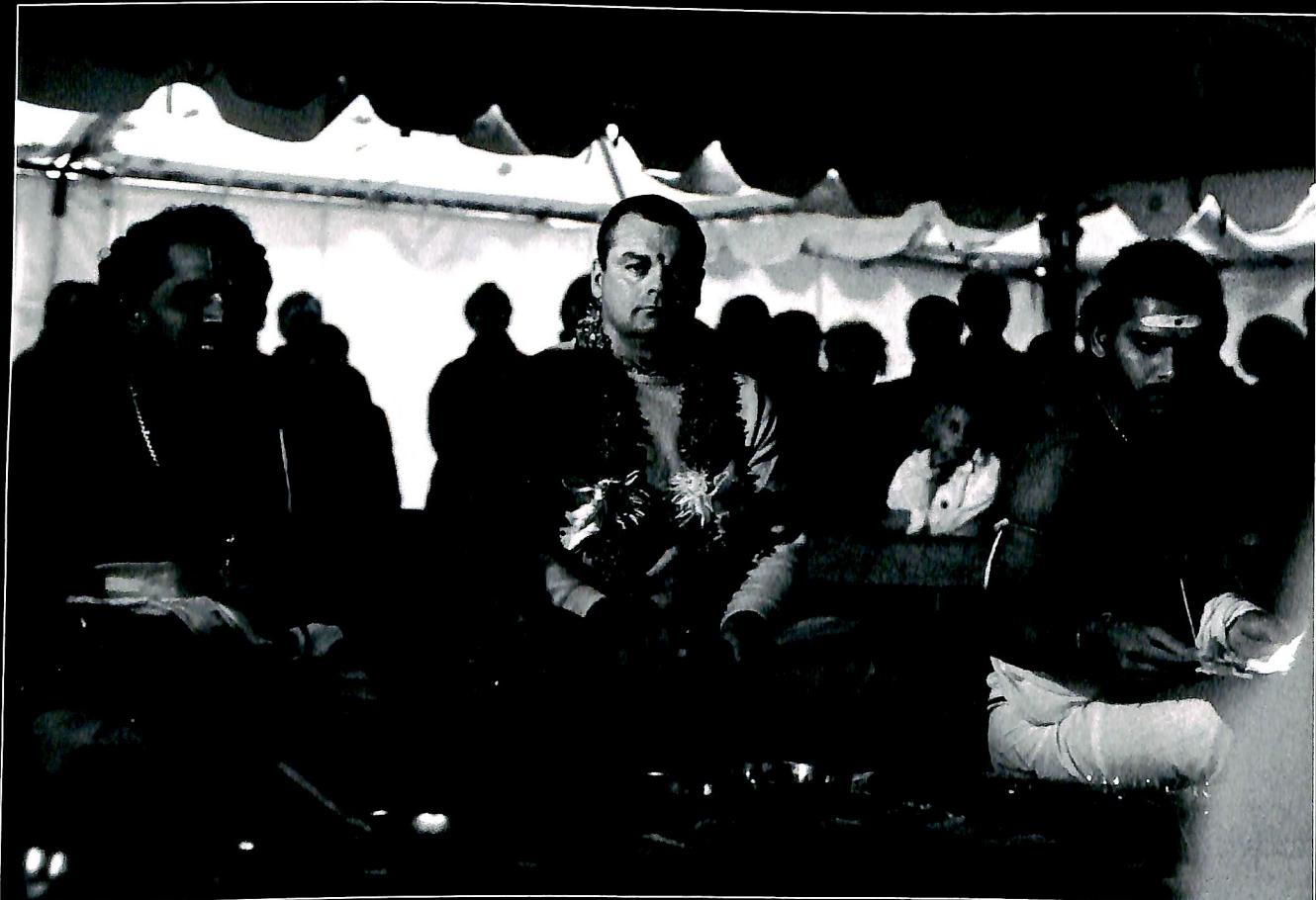
This is because, basically, our practice articulates a view of human life that differs profoundly from that of most of Western culture. I am optimistic that we can create an environment that will promote thinking in all kinds of diverse ways about the problems that confront us as human beings, and particularly the problems that will confront us in the next century. I believe strongly that

the more common and widely accepted religious and philosophical systems available to people are profoundly inadequate for meeting the needs of the culture and its future. We must explore real alternatives to these systems. The ways in which we can do that are unlimited.

The ceremonies that we celebrated brought together all of these various strands: the presence of Nityananda and Rudi, the past and the future, the culmination of at least twenty-some years' worth of hard work, and the coalescing of a whole lot of love on the part of many people. The ceremonies gathered everything up in one whole, and it is truly extraordinary for us to have been able to do that in one place and at one time.

The Opening Ceremonies

*of the Rudrananda Ashram and
the Nityananda Institute*



BARRY KAPLAN

*Portland, Oregon
October 22-24, 1993*

Our past and the ancient rituals of our lineage fused this weekend as we participated in three days of ceremonies to consecrate our new home and formally express deep respect and gratitude to our teachers for the transformation that this new life demonstrates and initiates.

The four rituals that were performed during the weekend wove together into a rich and delightful experience. As the ceremonies progressed we were filled with awe about practices that were simultaneously foreign to our American experience and in some unexplainable way very, very familiar.

Throughout the three days the sacred was surprisingly coexistent with the informal, unplanned, and humorous. Often the priests would interrupt their rhythmic chanting to change the order of events they initially had chosen. This simple, unpretentious approach to the rituals underscored, rather than minimized, the deep connection to spirit that was being established. The interruptions revealed the priests' sincere desire to perform the rituals carefully in a way that was appropriate to this community and our practice.

We were very fortunate to have five Brahmin priests from the Balaji Temples in Los Angeles, New York, and Tirupati, India, perform the ceremonies. The temple at Tirupati is the largest and wealthiest in Asia and the original temple of the followers of the Hindu saint, Balaji. The five priests, Krishna, Sitaram, Ramesh, Prashad, and Bali Nataraj, are friends with whom we now share a rich heritage as well as a joyous future.

In addition, Usha Raji and Chandrakant Khetani, members of the Balaji temple in Los Angeles and friends of Swamiji, in a very real and practical way made this weekend possible. Usha's role started three years ago when she told Swamiji, "You must have a fire ceremony when you move." Usha and Chandrakant located the priests and arranged for all the instruments, herbs, and other hard-to-find ceremonial objects

necessary for the pujas to be carried out properly. The priests and Swamiji then chose the dates for the celebration, based on certain configurations related to his time of birth and days that are astrologically auspicious for him. As it turns out Sunday was Dashara, one of the most important of Hindu religious days, and Friday was one of the few days when it is appropriate for the *shri chakra puja* to be held. (See "Honoring Our Past and Future.")

Chandrakant told us that while pujas are done every day by Hindus, special pujas are held for certain occasions. And this "was a very exclusive, very special puja." Usha explained that the *shri chakra puja* may never have been done before in the United States and is very rarely done in India. "Not everyone can do this thing that Swamiji has done. It is because of him that this has happened." Usha said later, "God must have been very happy about this *homam*; there were a few sprinkles of rain near the end of the ceremony, and then it really started to pour the moment the last person entered the building. In India this is very auspicious."

that Tantric practitioners undertook in the old days. In that foundational practice, slowly, slowly the substance of the *shri chakra* would be absorbed until experience of the structure of creative energy was totally internalized.

On this occasion, Swamiji held the puja to initiate our new place and acknowledge the transformation that the move to Portland represents. The ceremony was held on a low platform placed in the center of the meditation hall. Special objects, herbs and coconut milk, gold and silver coins, and garlands were placed on the stand. The priests, joined by Swamiji, gathered on the stand to begin the preparation phase of the ceremony. One priest wove strands of dry grass into rings that the priests and Swamiji wore. These are traditionally considered to be pure conduits worn to facilitate communication with the divine. The rings had strands that pointed up into the air and were worn on the middle finger of the right hand.

The other priests prepared the three sacramental objects that Swamiji contributed for the ceremony. The *shri chakra* sat on a silver tray between the statue of Ganesh and the *shiva lingam*. The three objects were draped with garlands and anointed with herbs and coconut milk. Swamiji was draped with a garland and passed coins which were then added to the tray of sacred objects as offerings. The statue of Nityananda was also given a garland, and the saint's blessing was invoked.

The ceremony of the three pujas followed these preparations. All together these devotions included an hour or more of chanting. For each puja, a small fire ceremony was held, while specific mantras and names of deities and saints were recited. The priest Krishna, who led the ceremony with Swamiji, recited and Swamiji repeated each mantra and name while circling a tray with burning camphor over first Ganesh, then the *shiva lingam*, and finally the *shri chakra*.

Swamiji then took a few moments to state



FRIDAY NIGHT

Shri Chakra Puja

Initiation and transformation

The *shri chakra* depicts the process by which experience manifests and all of life arises. A number of years ago a study was done to record the visual patterns made when chanting *om*. The image the oscilloscope recorded was the geometric pattern of intersecting triangles, concentric circles, and squares that we know as the *shri chakra*. This graphic representation captures the structure of the whole universe, according to Shaiva-Shakta philosophy, and the puja is the first practice

his intention in holding this ceremony to initiate our new home.

We do this to honor the traditions of the past that nourish us and feed our practice in the present. Though the form of our practice differs from the practices of the past, the essence is the same. In this ceremony we honor that deep, rich current that stirs the future so that we may fulfill our search for self-realization.

At one point during the ceremony one of the priests circled the room blessing all who participated by using a grass brush to scatter coconut milk on each of us. At the end we all received *prasad*, first a piece of fruit and then a *bindi*, a dot of red pigment pressed onto the forehead.

Homam

Sacrifice and invocation of the highest energy to be established in this place

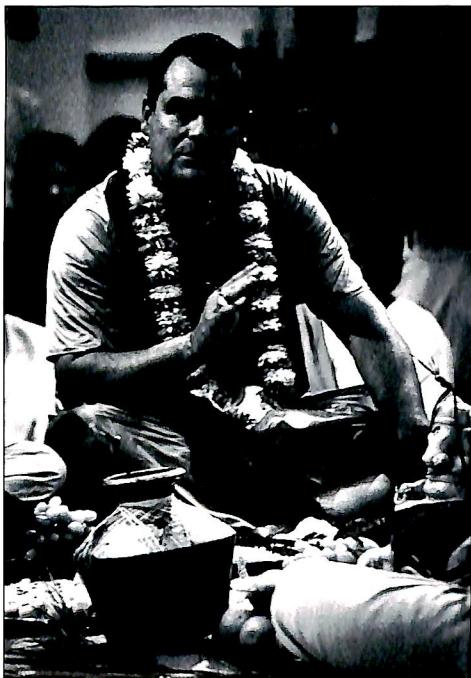
Rudi said once that sacrifice was the releasing of everything that is lower to allow for that which is highest to fill us. So it was with the fire ceremony performed throughout this weekend. As the fire burned and the chanting filled the air, as the flowers and fruit and ghee were thrown into the flames, and as the smoke curled round the tent and into the sky, the limitations of the past and the stress of preparations seemed to dissolve and a finer energy infused the whole gathering. The following describes the activities of the three sessions of the homam.



SATURDAY MORNING

A tent had been raised around the fire pit built in the southern courtyard and chairs placed around the central brick octagon for observers. As the audience gathered and the priests prepared the herbs and objects for the pujas, several people on ladders

raised an orange fireproof cloth to hover over the fire pit. The cloth had been found early that morning at the request of the



PATRICIA SLOTE

*“In this ceremony
we honor that
deep, rich current
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self-realization.”*

priests to allow the smoke to go out of the tent but “not to touch the sky.”

Again, as on the night before, the dry grass was woven into rings of purity to communicate with the divine and to serve as brushes for anointing the ritual objects and for scattering offerings into the fire and

onto the participants. Yellow, red, white, and pink herbs—turmeric, kumkum, abil, and gularl—were carefully drawn in symmetrical lines on the bricks surrounding the fire pit and flowers of the same colors were placed between the lines of herbs.

Twelve brass urns (each representing a puja to be performed) were filled with water that had been sprinkled with saffron, nutmeg, and turmeric as well as some water from the Ganges that Swamiji contributed. Each urn was placed on a bed of white rice grains and dried beans (lentils or mung, etc.) or brown rice. A coconut was placed in the mouth of each urn and the urns were draped in garlands and red, blue, pink, or gold scarves. A grass ring was presented to each urn, with the brush standing straight up in the air above the coconut like a sentry’s rifle. The urns were positioned purposefully to “face” the fire. First there was Ganesh, remover of all obstacles and the representative of all the deities. Then came the deities of the nine planets, placed in three rows of three. Then two urns, one for Rudrananda and one for Nityananda. Usually the homam has eleven pujas, the eleventh being for the guru of that temple. In this case it was twelve to suit our practice. The shiva lingam and the shri chakra, used in Friday night’s puja, were also placed before the fire.

Trays of fruit, gold and silver coins and eight packets of gems, baskets holding eighty coconuts, and jars and jars of ghee made from 100 pounds of sweet butter were all brought to be offered into the fire. A stack of wood sat on the wall behind the ceremonial stand and fire pit. The blessing of the participants in the ceremony began without fanfare, while some of the priests continued to gather and prepare the objects. As Swamiji had presided over the ritual on Friday night, so other members and friends of the community presided at the ceremonies on Saturday and Sunday: Steven Ott in the morning, Bob Shoemaker and Sharon Ward in the evening, Swamiji with Usha and Chandrakant on Sunday morning at the homam, and Swamiji

with Rudi's brother and sister-in-law, David and Phyllis Rudolph, at Rudi's shrine.

Garlands and grass rings were bestowed, and Krishna guided the recitation of the



BARRY KAPLAN

mantras and the names of deities and teachers. Coins were passed around the circle of priests and offered to the deities symbolized by the urns. As the chanting began in earnest, the fire was started and the offerings were rhythmically made. Ghee stoked the flames and camphor-scented smoke filled the air above our heads. After several hours one of the priests walked through the crowd blessing each of us with coconut milk. We then lined up to receive fruit and a bindi as on the night before.



SATURDAY EVENING

At dusk we returned to the tent and the priests resumed their chanting. The fire which had burned all day was again stoked with ghee and the offerings of flowers and coconuts and herbs continued. As the dark gathered around us, the firelight danced across the faces of the priests and the regular rhythm of their chanting and the smell of camphor pulled our attention inward. In the stillness and the firelight, time dissolved. It could have been 5,000 years ago.

Following dinner a concert was given by Ali Akbar Khan and Swapan Chaudhuri

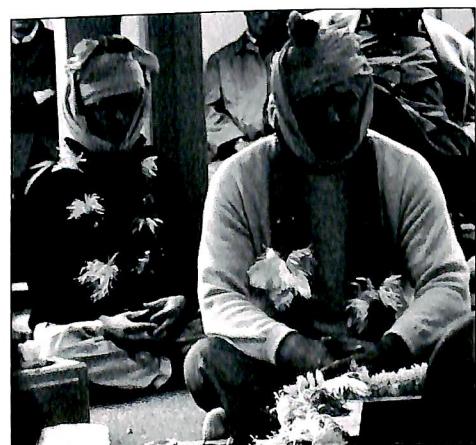
which Swamiji said was the prasad for the weekend. These two masters threw their whole lives into the performance that night adding greatly to the spirit of sacrifice, transformation, and infusion of creative energy that pervaded the weekend. (See "Musical Prasad.")

While the rest of us slept some residents took shifts so that all through the night the fire was stoked.



SUNDAY MORNING

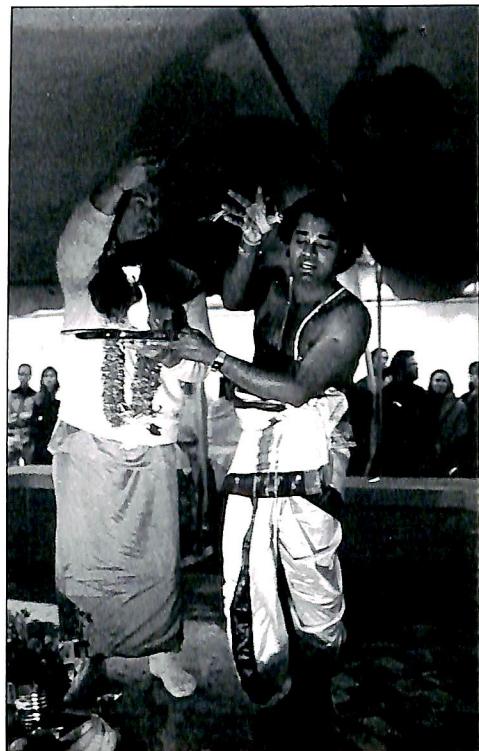
We returned to the fire on Sunday morning where several chanting rituals were conducted simultaneously. Ramesh sat by the twelve urns and quietly intoned mantras and anointed each urn. This quiet, almost private ritual lasted nearly half of the hour we stood around the fire for this last segment of the homam. While he completed the twelve pujas, the other priests continued to chant in unison, making offerings to the fire and reciting mantras as in the previous sessions. Then suddenly the priests stood and all the offerings were put in the fire at once. Dozens of coconuts,



BARRY KAPLAN

flowers, and herbs slid off their trays and into the flames while the chanting reached a crescendo. The homam was finished.

The priests then began to dismantle the



BARRY KAPLAN

arrangement of twelve urns, and Swamiji called Howard Boster to come forward. Krishna began to wrap Howard's head with one of the red-orange scarves that had draped the urns. On top of that, in the ring formed by the turban, he rested one of the urns. The result was a sight that caused an eruption of glee through the crowd until even the priests were laughing, while Howard smiled benignly and attempted dignity. Steve Ott was grinning at the sight of Howard until he was startled by one of the priests wrapping his head too. This created a new stir of delight among us, and then Krishna began to explain what was to come next.

All twelve of the urns now sanctified by the fire ceremony would be carried throughout the main floor of the Ashram, bringing the vibration of the homam to every entrance of the building. At each door coconuts would be broken and at key places some of the blessed objects from the homam would be permanently installed. While Krishna was explaining all of this, Cecilia Bonner walked through the crowd placing on each of our foreheads a bindi of ash from the fire. Swamiji was then wrapped with the gold scarf that had surrounded all of the



the priests, and the urn bearers, each of us stepping over the broken coconut and burning camphor and into the house with the right foot first.

The procession wound along the main floor and ended at the statue of Nityananda in the new meditation hall. The urns, garlands, and platters of fruit which had been carried in the procession were placed before the statue as the priests began the chanting for the prana patishta.



Prana Patishta

Bringing the life force into the statue of Nityananda

In silence we stood in a semicircle around the statue as the priests chanted and made offerings and oblations. Then Swamiji and Krishna anointed Nityananda with ghee and the water from the urns. Each chakra point was touched and the eyes were brushed to life. Finally, a cloth was held by the priests around Swamiji and Krishna as they quietly focused on invoking the life force of Nityananda.

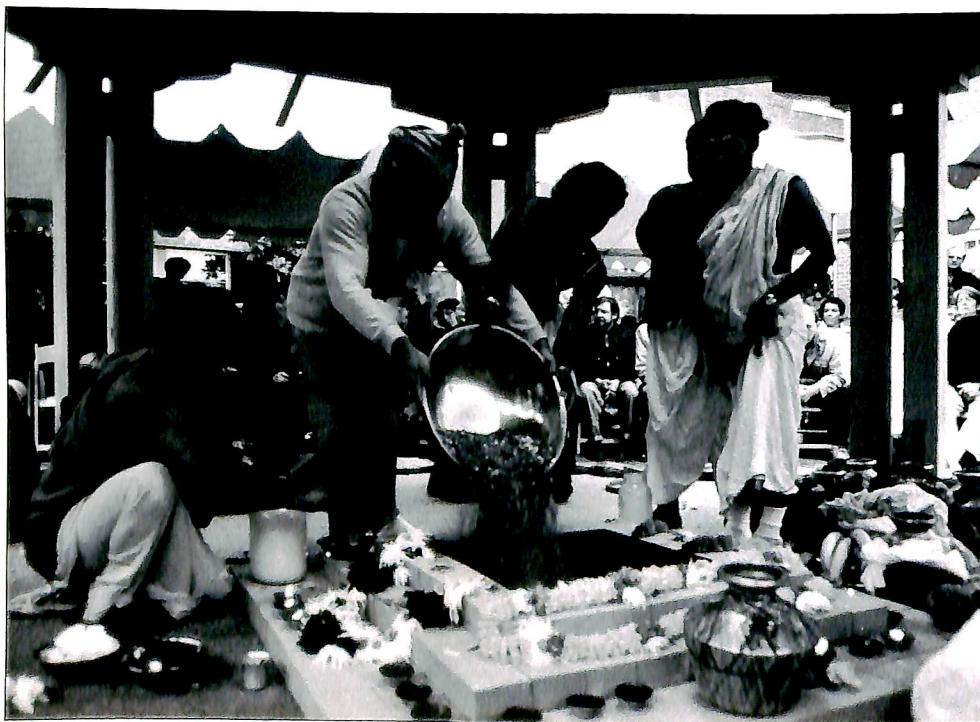
And then it was done and the priests asked us all to bow to Nityananda.



The Consecration of Rudi's Shrine

Paying our deepest respects to Rudi and offering this new Ashram to him as a place where all his students may come

Slowly we filed out of the meditation hall and outside where the weekend's ceremonies culminated in the consecration of Rudi's shrine.



BARRY KAPLAN

A tent had been erected over the new lawn to protect us in case it rained. Swamiji and the priests gathered under the roof of the new shrine and the rest of us took our seats quietly as the priests began the ceremonies. Swamiji then motioned to Rudi's brother and sister-in-law, the Rudolphs, to join him and the priests around the fire pit in the center of the shrine. The fire was lit and stoked with ghee which the priests ladled into the flames at the end of each verse they chanted. Coconuts were broken and camphor was burned at each of the eight sides of the shrine. The Rudolphs and Swamiji were given garlands and blessed as in the previous ceremonies and they each added offerings to the fire in honor of Rudi.



"Those of us who were Rudi's students always worked with Rudi. We never learned to work with each other. And until now there has never been a place where everyone who knew Rudi could come be with him. This is Rudi's place and all who knew him are welcome here."

Following this ceremony we returned to the meditation hall where the weekend activities were concluded by the priests from each of the three temples chanting separately, one after another. Swamiji then introduced them all to us and hugs of gratitude and friendship were exchanged and photographs taken.

Diane Asay



BARRY KAPLAN

"Until now there has never been a place where everyone who knew Rudi could come be with him. This is Rudi's place and all who knew him are welcome here."



The exchange of energy and expression between the two musicians was like an intimate, joyful dance.



The Institute and guests were thrilled on Saturday evening of the inaugural celebration by a phenomenal performance by two of the finest Indian classical musicians in the world, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and Swapan Chaudhuri.

To everyone's delight, Swamiji himself took the stage to introduce the musicians and remark on the significance of their presence as the fulfillment of a wish he had held for many years. Swamiji's friendship with Khansahib dates back to the Ashram's beginnings in Bloomington, Indiana, and Khansahib has performed for several Institute-sponsored events in Bloomington and later in Cambridge. Each time they met over the years, Swamiji asked him, and Khansahib agreed, to play for the dedication ceremonies when the Institute found a suitable home—an event, Swamiji said, that Indian astrologers repeatedly assured him would happen "next year." "We fired those astrologers . . ." quipped Swamiji. When it became clear at long last that we would purchase our new Portland home and might complete the meditation hall by autumn, Swamiji contacted Khansahib. Although his concert schedule is usually booked at least a year ahead, miraculously, he was available for this night. This special performance, Swamiji told us, was *prasad*—a teacher's blessing given out to the participants as a remembrance of the sweetness of the weekend's events.

Khansahib, considered a "national living treasure" in India, is the greatest living master of the sarod, a resonant lute-like instrument with 25 strings and a fretless steel fingerboard. In formal concerts the sarod is usually accompanied by tabla, the traditional two-piece Indian drums, of which Swapan Chaudhuri is a master in his own right. James Pomerantz accompanied them on tanpura.

The musicians performed two ragas. The first was composed by Khansahib's father, a melody to the goddess Durga that conveys a mood of devotion and joy. It began with Khansahib playing a long,

slow movement by himself—"like a prayer or meditation," he told the audience—but quickly heated up when Swapan joined on the tabla. The two musicians delighted the audience with their beautiful and often playful musical interaction.

In the second raga, Khansahib stole the show with his astonishing virtuosity on the sarod. There were even moments where he seemed to elicit amazing sounds from his instrument without using his fingers.

In the powerful final portion, Khansahib and Swapan mesmerized the audience with a back-and-forth play in which the drummer echoed Khansahib's rhythms, force, and even timbre, with increasing fire. The exchange of energy and expression between the two musicians was like an intimate, joyful dance that held the listeners spellbound until the explosive ending brought everyone in the audience to their feet.

Ali Akbar Khan, now 71, has been studying music since the age of 3; he was taught by his father who played 200 instruments and has been called the Beethoven of India. Khansahib maintains a full teaching schedule at his school in

California, the Ali Akbar College of Music, and gives concerts nearly every weekend. As Khansahib told friends, he always travels the day before a concert so that he can spend the day of the concert preparing himself. He remains silent and eats little during that day, quieting and emptying himself so that by the time of the concert he is ready to simply be open. He doesn't think about what to play, but lets the music flow through him. As he describes it, he becomes part of the audience during the concert, and remembers it like a dream.

For Khansahib, playing music is a joyous event. As he puts it, he feels like he is 16 years old when he finishes a performance—and about 200 years old 48 hours later. The life and love that Khansahib and Swapan poured out in this compelling performance were a wonderful *prasad* that will be long remembered.

Karen Jones

MUSICAL PRASAD



PATRICK RIORDAN





BARRY KARLAN

October 24, 1993

SWAMI CHETANANANDA



First, I want to take this opportunity to welcome everybody. I am sincerely grateful that all of you have come, those of you from Portland and those of you from across the world. I very much appreciate your taking the time to come here and share this extraordinary occasion with us.

It makes my heart overflow to be here today with Rudi's family, his brother and sister-in-law, who looked upon us in New York, at first, as at least a nuisance and maybe as a real cause for concern. Over the last twenty years they have become really deep and true friends of ours. It is wonderful to be with Rudi's friends from Bloomington, Indiana, Professor Thubten Norbu who knew him since the early sixties, and all of you from around the country. In this circle of friends it's as if the whole history of our community and our endeavor is here with us.

Ever since 1971 when Rudi sent me back to Indiana to start an Ashram, I've been working constantly to create an environment that I thought really reflected the



strength, sensitivity, caring, and determination that Rudi embodied and transmitted.

Rudi was a really remarkable man. When we were around him it was as if multi-dimensional worlds opened up to us. He worked enormously hard, yet in this tremendous hard work that he did, he didn't get tense or frustrated or tired. He became increasingly more loving and increasingly more able. In his devotion he showed us the way to become free from our own complexities and our own limitations and our own pain.

That is so inspirational; how can we not follow? And in our following look what has happened. This place has come about as an environment which expresses our devotion to that extraordinary gift he made possible in our lives - at a great personal cost to himself - and it also represents our commitment to carry on that caring. Following his example, it may become possible that even one person will be inspired to rise above the difficulty of their own life and find something higher and finer that lives within them, that reflects or in some way manifests the qualities of the Absolute.

This Ashram is not about spiritual ideas. It is not about spiritual philosophy or traditions. It is about spiritual experience, the experience of spirit which exists prior to and transcends every tradition. It's about contact with the highest reality and living that contact every single day in our ordinary lives. It's about finding the balance between that extraordinary idealism and our pragmatic need to face the diversity and complexity of daily life.

Rudi was an incredible man who introduced me to more diversity than I ever at first cared to deal with. Believe me, coming from a small town in Indiana, I wasn't exposed to much of it. But he showed the way for us to face diversity, to continually open ourselves to encompass it and find within it more and more reasons to actually live the inspired life that we discovered

within ourselves. That life lives within everyone and is also the life of our community and the life of this Ashram.

It is because of Rudi that this place exists. It was Rudi who did the hard work. He spent years in India in a culture which was totally

what spirituality is in the whole universe. Rudi then put this forth to us in a very simple straightforward way, without any mis-direction. It was then up to us to either take it or not. Especially for kids from Indiana who hadn't faced much diversity, Rudi's straightforwardness was an enormous benefit for which we will always be deeply grateful.

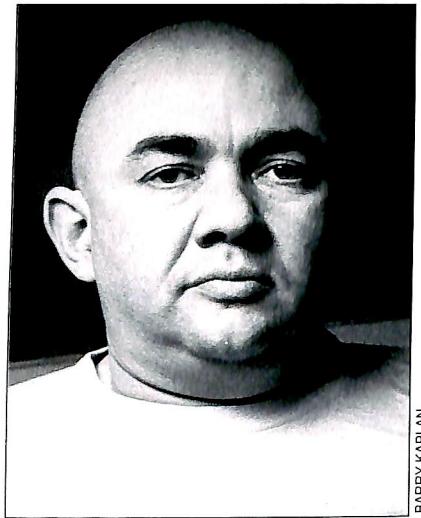
I feel more at peace in myself now than I have ever felt in my life because we have finally created an environment that truly reflects the qualities that Rudi carried around in himself. The character of the building, the quality of the community that happens within it, and the presence and the energy which is here - in so many ways it reminds me of his company. I am really grateful to be able to offer him this splendid place to live.

I don't feel that this is my Ashram or that I have done anything in all this except remain steadfast in my devotion to Rudi. I think of this as our Ashram, and it exists only because of Rudi. It also exists because of Rudi's devotion to his own guru. This is a place where together we express our total unity of spirit with Rudi and Nityananda in our undertaking to palpably, with our hearts and minds, touch the absolute highest reality, which Nityananda and Rudi embodied.

So I once again welcome you all. It's been an incredible occasion to be here and share this with you. It's with a lot of joy that I look around the room and think about all of the really extraordinary experiences we've all shared throughout the years, and I want you to know that on behalf of Rudi and on behalf of Nityananda, I think I can safely say that this is their home and my home and your home and our home for the duration.

So it seems redundant to welcome you to your own home, but I do.

And now the Rudrananda Ashram is officially opened and I think I should say, *Sadgurunath Maharaj Ki Jay*.

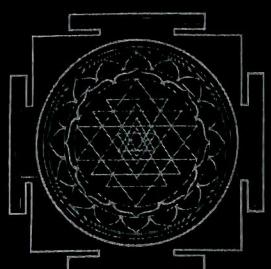


*"It is
because
of Rudi
that
this place
exists."*

foreign to himself, and he really absorbed the essence of what spirituality is in India. This is amazing, because with all due respect to our Indian friends, teachers there train with more indirection and misdirection than straightforward, simple spiritual teaching. At least all the Indian gurus that I ever met seem to train you in what not to be like, and then if you're lucky, you stumble on to what spirituality really is. But Rudi dealt with that. He stayed true and pure in his own heart and got through it. He reached into, absorbed, and understood the essence of what India has to offer - the essence of



*“Rudi was a really remarkable man.
In his devotion he showed us the way to become free
from our own complexities and
our own limitations and our own pain.”*



Getting from There to Here

What does it take to physically relocate an entire community — people, offices, furniture, art, pets, vehicles, and more — to a new home 3,000 miles away? Love and dedication, planning, and continuous effort were the keys to the Institute's remarkably smooth transition from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to its new Portland home.

Shortly after the move became a probability in Fall 1992, several committees set to work to figure out how to make it all happen. A transportation committee weighed options for moving household goods and cars, and a communication group created a resource file for Institute members with every conceivable type of Portland-related information. Probably the most visible committee was the pack-and-haul group, which supplied members with incredible amounts of boxes, tape, and bubble wrap during several months of intensive packing.

The move started to feel real to Institute members in late January 1993 when we loaded the first truck — a 24-foot van packed to the gills with the equipment and belongings of the pioneer crew that was going out to renovate the Portland residence. Although the slush on the ground and our relative inexperience made this a challenge, this first truck was mere practice for the March 15 truck, loaded on a day when the “storm of the century” was predicted for the Boston area.

Anyone still doubting the reality of the move to Oregon was set straight that day by the presence of a 48-foot van in front of the 11 Linnaean residence. The crew began at 6:30 a.m. and worked feverishly, chaining boxes from our former meditation room to the sidewalk and calling out requests for boxes of a particular size to fill the space. Packers on the truck, balanced precariously on stepladders, stacked and stuffed boxes to

use every cubic inch. By noon the van was filled, just as the first large flakes began to swirl around the truck. A cheer arose from the entire group as the doors were closed.

This scenario (minus the snow) was repeated over and over again during April, and especially during May and early June, when we loaded one, sometimes two, 48-foot vans each weekend for a total of 12 truckloads. For each truck, as many as 40 residents and friends showed up at eight in the morning at one of the Institute's Cambridge houses to chain boxes, deliver items to the central loading area, do last-minute padding and labeling, pack the truck like a 3-D jigsaw puzzle, prepare copious amounts

moves, as the weather warmed, parents brought their kids out to marvel at the moving van and stayed around to watch the community at work. It's a rare thing these days to see so many people working together and having a good time. We saw wonder and longing in the eyes of passers-by as they witnessed what real community can be.

Special care was taken in preparing the Institute's art for a cross-country move. Two of the heaviest pieces — a stone Jain Buddha and a large Indiana limestone sculpture — were lifted by crane from their outdoor sites to the flatbed truck that carried them, draped and tied, all the way to Portland. Institute carpenters constructed custom-made reinforced plywood crates for the other sculptural pieces and valuable art work while packers protected paintings with bubble wrap and large sheets of corrugated board.

The story of the move would not be complete without mention of the mammoth yard sales that preceded many of the truck loadings — lightening everyone's load and generating funds for the transition.

During this entire long-term event, many people contributed immense amounts of time and skill, week after week. Of these, Howard Boster deserves special thanks for coordinating the moving vans and the staging areas, building crates and supervising the art packing, loading nearly every van, driving the art truck to Portland, and always cheerfully knocking himself out to do anything else that was needed to make the move go smoothly. The whole community is also especially indebted to Ruth Knight, Steve Ott, Duncan Soule, Bob Shoemaker, and Monica O'Neal for their tireless help on the moving project. To these and all the others who worked so hard and gave so generously of their time, thank you — you made it happen!

Karen Jones



LINDA POPE

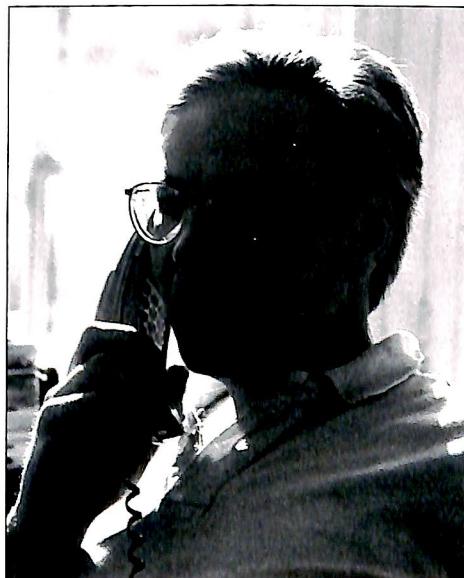
N.I. BUILDERS MIRACLE WORKERS

In late January of this year, a small group of Institute members completed arrangements to leave their jobs, schools, and careers in the Boston area, packed up their belongings, and headed west for the Institute's new home in Portland, Oregon. This advance building crew, under the direction of Steve Coyle, took up residence in the former infirmary (east wing) of the old Laurelhurst Manor which had been built originally as a nursing home in 1910. Known as N.I. Builders, the group from Cambridge immediately set to work on a renovation and building project of mammoth proportions.

During the nine months of intense work that followed, N.I. Builders moved its offices from the main floor of the old manor to a construction trailer in the west parking lot, and finally to a nearby rented house. Following N.I. Builders through its various incarnations, one is most impressed by what remains constant: extraordinary levels of cooperation, hard work, good cheer, and service. The following three flashbacks present some of the key moments in its extraordinary career.

**March 25, 1993
RENOVATION
Stage One:
Worse Before Better**

The infirmary where the N.I. Builders crew now resides is about the only place in the old manor not completely choked with



*Special thanks
to Steve Coyle
and Jim
Brissette for
their
leadership,
hard work,
and good
cheer.*

dust. This is not to say the living is easy. Increasingly, there are electrical and plumbing shutdowns as upgrading progresses in the main building. The "First Wave" (as the group calls itself) has also had to contend with surprise roof leaks, erratic heating, and frequently cold showers.

In the main building there is hardly an area left untouched by the demolition crew and its crowbars. Many of the old plaster walls have been entirely ripped out leaving only the two-by-four framing. All the bathrooms have been stripped of their tubs, sinks, and toilets, and on the third floor all of the fake wood panelling has been disposed of. Throughout the building, the old carpeting has been ripped out and all the doors have been taken down for refinishing. The work site looks alarmingly like a war zone with piles of old plaster, plumbing, and building debris of all sorts waiting to be emptied down the metal chute into the 30-yard dumpster — one of twenty that have already come and gone in the south courtyard. In every room heavy clouds of dust hang in the air and most of the workers sport protective face masks.

In the N.I. Builders' office, now set up in the east wing sunroom, the atmosphere is one of intense focus in the midst of chaos. The second fax machine has just "bit the dust," and members of the office crew are continually wiping the accumulated grit off their computers and monitor screens. The noise of power tools, engines, the foremen on their walkie-talkies, and lumber crashing into the dumpster from the top of the

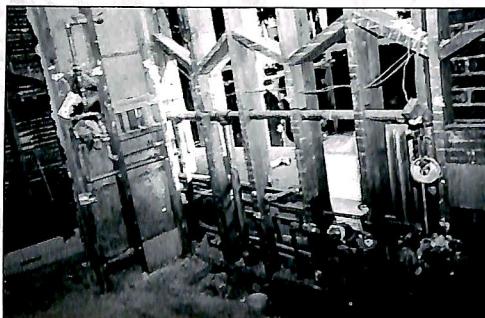
third-floor chute is deafening and creates yet another challenge to office staff trying to talk on the telephones.

Aside from the dozen Institute members who comprise N.I. Builders, the site swarms with at least 40 local workers hired to help with the project along with as many as ten subcontractors and their workers. One of this group walks into the office carrying a water pipe cut from the building's plumbing system. Holding it to the sunlight, he shows those assembled how the old pipe is so blocked by mineral deposits that no light passes through. The plumber reports that when the water got turned back on, not even a trickle found its way through the section of pipe still attached to the water main.

Throughout the whole building workers continue to bring the facility up to Oregon's latest earthquake building codes. The baseboards along the outside walls of all four floors have been removed and the lower two feet of every exterior plaster wall demolished to make room for the metal angle irons that clamp the floors to the exterior brick walls all the way around the periphery of the building.



In the southeast corner of the living room the 12-foot-long gaping hole that runs from the basement to the third floor is beginning to be closed up. Named "the horror wall," this is the most challenging of the five shear walls which will reinforce the building in case of earthquakes. Five bathrooms have had to be torn apart to make space for the new masonry structure going up inside the exterior wall of the living room.



One of the main features of recent building tours for visiting Institute members has been standing on the third floor and looking down to the basement level through the shafts created for the retaining walls, some of which are 25 feet long.

N.I. Builders manages work on an impressive array of jobs besides the seismic, plumbing, and electrical upgrade of the entire facility. Some of the existing space is being extensively remodelled, and major portions of the floors, drywall, and trim are being refinished. Work also includes new window treatment, painting, and carpeting. Finally, there are plans for extensive landscaping and site improvements for beauty and privacy.

The goal of all this amazing activity is to have the facility ready for occupancy on the first of June, and to have the new meditation hall ready for Swamiji's birthday celebration at the end of July. Given the volume of work to be completed in only a few months, this would appear to be an impossible undertaking by ordinary standards. However, the crew is moving ahead with remarkable speed and efficiency and plans to finish on time.

MAY 24, 1993

On the Verge of Occupying the Ashram.

If you're looking for the nerve center of the frenzy of building activity that surrounds and permeates the impressive brick structure at 1025 N.E. 33rd Avenue, just step inside the construction trailer that sits only ten feet from the west wall of the facility. The trailer houses the N.I. Builder's office and a steady stream of N.I. foremen, and local subcontractors, workers, and vendors.

At any given time one of several phones is ringing, or the foremen are calling each other on their walkie-talkies to check up on the progress at various points around the site. Sam Yoder sits at his drafting table surrounded by blueprints and massive binders filled with building material specifications. Chris Burns is at the far end of the trailer talking with vendors and fielding two phone calls at once. Lubosh Cech and Laura Santi sit at their computers preparing the week's financial report to fax to Cambridge. Steve Coyle moves from one knot of activity to another, answering first a question about the grade of gravel for the asphalt in the new parking lot, and then dashing out to supervise the pouring of the concrete in the meditation hall foundation walls. Rachel Gaffney calls in from the hardware store with questions about window latches. Susan Marshall is in the front office setting up details for the upcoming building inspection. A moment later she races out to find one of the foremen with an emergency message about some building material that has been delayed. Jim Brissette, pencil behind his ear and phone on his hip, comes through to pick up messages and direct Ed Rosen to refinish some water-damaged ceilings. Steve's dog, Hootz, lies panting on the top step of the trailer's entry stairs, receiving a pat from all who pass back and forth. On and on it goes, this steady stream of activity.

What is remarkable to the new arrival from

Cambridge is the palpable level of good cheer and thoughtfulness that pervades the frenzied activity in the trailer — this, in spite of many months of intense work, long hours, and the rising temperature from the afternoon sun beating down on the trailer. Steve Coyle suddenly breaks into song; Jim Brissette sincerely wishes his contact at the lumber yard a good day — after being let down by him on a delivery; Sam Yoder looks up from his drafting table to make the perfect wry comment. Laughter breaks out all around. The level of concentration and attention to detail is intense, and one is struck by the easy flow of interaction among all who pour in and out of the trailer.

One of the chief goals of the past four months has been to pass the series of inspections that will permit the Institute to occupy the facility by June 1. Four additional Institute members have recently arrived from Cambridge to help with the final installation of door locks and closure systems. The building inspector comes through

the resolve to fix every possible problem on the spot. The amazed inspector, looping back on his course, finds smoke gaskets in door frames which had been empty only minutes before.

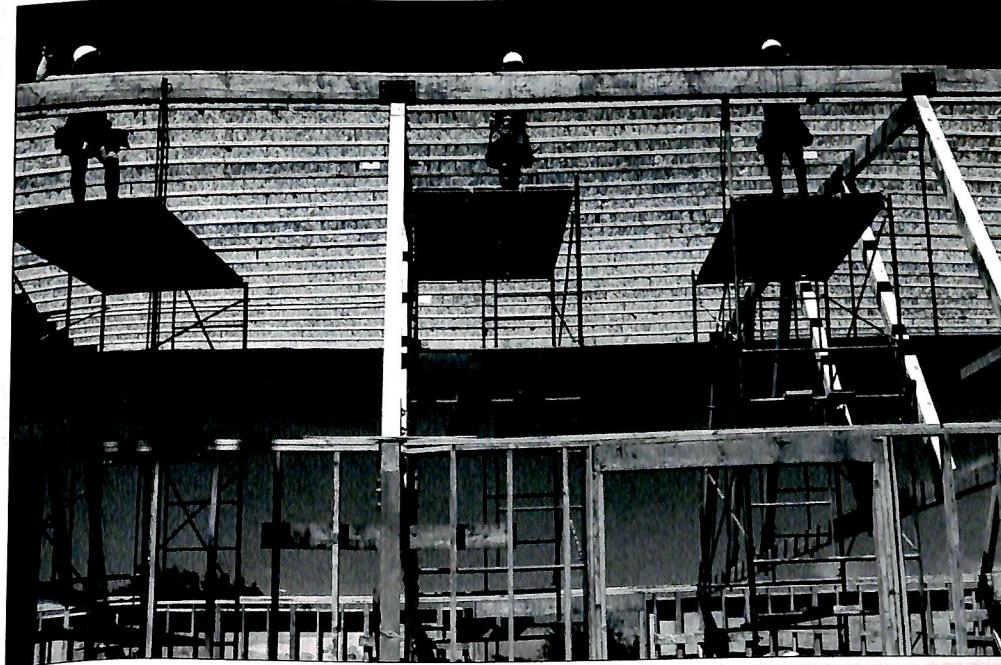
The “punch list” which contains all the final details that need more work keeps the whole N.I. building crew working until midnight during the final days before the crucial inspection. Some of the local subcontractors and laborers work into the evening hours as well.

When work stops late in the evening, the night security shifts begin. Members of the N.I. team take turns guarding the building — now unoccupied until the certificate of occupancy is granted. The “watch dogs” get to sleep a few extra hours in the morning and then appear, red-eyed, to take on the next day’s projects.

The whole building, from top to bottom, throbs with activity, noise, and fumes: the

erated by Jim Hassan, Steve Hynson, Jerry Sutherland, and their woodworking crew currently set up in the living room; on the second floor, a couple of workmen send huge rolls of protective paper barrelling down the halls to cover the new carpets; Al DeWitt is rappelling off a dizzying slope of roof with a bucket of green paint he’s applying to the metal trim; in the basement utility room, Dan Spencer is working on the elevator, trying to get it running again before the building crew “takes a break” to unpack one of the 48-foot semi trucks about to arrive from Cambridge; and Meg Pennock and Marty Keady are busy in the kitchen of the little house keeping the whole crew hale and hardy with their endless round of great meals and snacks.

Right now it is hard to imagine that within days the City building inspection will be completed, Swamiji and a first wave of Cambridge Institute residents will arrive, and this construction site will be transformed into a residential facility and spiritual center.



the site on a preliminary tour in which he tests every door and looks into every closet. Walking down the various hallways, he is followed by Steve Coyle, Susan Marshall, Jim Brissette, and an eager cluster of Institute workers bristling with power tools and

sounds of power tools, radios, and the fire alarm system which is being tested from all points of the building assault the ears; paint and varnish fumes hang heavy and thick in the air; the afternoon sun dimly filters through the clouds of sawdust being gen-

OCTOBER 18, 1993

**Final Days Before
the Opening Ceremonies**

The view looking down from the new meditation room over the shrine area looks remarkably like some exotic stage set to a grand opera. It’s around seven in the evening, already dark out, and floodlights are cutting through a gently falling mist. About fifty people are moving about in various clusters and configurations with rakes, shovels, and wheelbarrows. The area is accented with mounds of fieldstone pavers and hills of dirt.

Downstage right: The N.I. bobcat scoots along beside the east wing, whirls, and dumps a load of topsoil. Four people with rakes move in and level out the dirt, mixing it in with the clay subsoil. Not far upstage a couple of people are fitting plastic piping which will carry water to the

new lawn and planted areas. Beside them another pair is digging a ditch to hold the water pipes, one heftily wielding a pickax through a layer of packed gravel and clay. Below them and stage left there is another group setting large fieldstones into a walkway around the periphery of the shrine. On an upper level backstage several people are arranging and planting bushes in the newly leveled soil.

Centerstage: Four people are perched on the shrine roof, cutting, fitting, and nailing down wooden shingles. Below them at ground level two wheelbarrows are being pushed back and forth with loads of topsoil for the area to be sodded. The small mountain of dirt miraculously falls away to lawn level, gets raked out, and finally is compacted with a heavy metal roller.

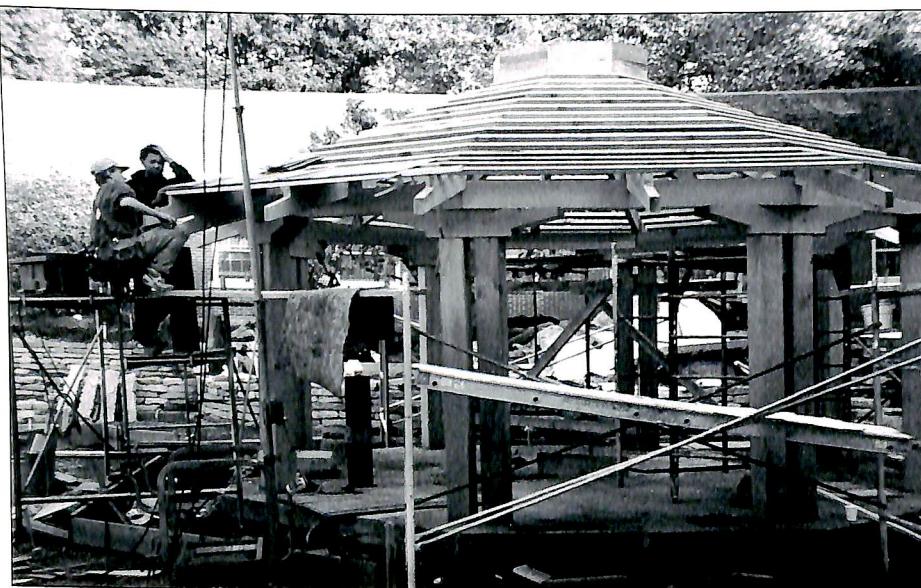
Upstage center: Stone walls are being carefully fitted along the foundation of the meditation hall. It takes two people to lift the larger pavers into place. After careful scrutiny some stones fit to satisfaction, others have to be carried back to the pile and a new hunt for the perfectly shaped stone gets under way.

Upstage left: A crew is planting ferns and bushes along the lower entrance of the meditation hall. The grade on the path has been inadvertently raised by the spare dirt from the plantings so a couple of people are directed to scrape clay off the walkway into wheelbarrows. They take turns threading their way through the scene, downstage right to the large dirt berm which hides Sandy Boulevard.

In fact, the stage is far grander than the area directly around the shrine. Through the kitchen windows one can make out a whole other crew of people preparing



dinner and making pastries for the coming celebrations. Under the meditation room, on the ground level of the new building, doorknobs are being fitted into doors, bathroom stall dividers are being leveled and screwed into the floors and walls, and a team of painters is putting second coats



PATRICIA SLOTE

onto the baseboards and door trim in the N.I. offices. In the meditation hall, final work is being done on the lighting and security systems.

In the brick courtyard on the other side of the Ashram, another crew plants the last of the flower beds and covers the area with bark mulch. In the center octagon, cinder blocks are being cemented into place to form a four-foot by four-foot fire pit

where the Brahmin priests will perform the homam ceremony.

Throughout this unusual stage setting, there is a central figure whose presence ties the whole scene together. Swamiji appears suddenly—when most needed—first at one location and then another. He gives final directions on the placement of a stone carving, or the quality of lighting, or the grade of gravel to be used between the pavers. He appears in a window of the meditation room, calls down to the crews working in the shrine area, shares a joke, and fills everyone up with his love and appreciation.

Steve Coyle, Jim Brissette, Bill Lennertz, and Andrea Soule are doing a superb job in organizing and training all these crews. Institute members are putting in the usual full day's work and then volunteering their

time and energy each evening as instant bricklayers, pipe fitters, hardware installers, landscaping specialists, roofers, painters, and cooks. Everyone works together in the same spirit of cooperation and community service that has permeated N.I. Builders from its inception in February.

Looking out from the meditation hall windows there is something even more impressive than the amount of sheer work going on below; it is the palpable atmosphere of love that permeates the whole event. And this love is there—shared by all in spite of the pressure, the inevitable mistakes, and the general fatigue as the group comes together in this last great effort to finish the new building and landscaping in time for the October 23 and 24 opening ceremonies.

Joan Ames

Sree Chakravarti



For three weeks this September, the Institute was blessed by the presence of a very special guest from India. Sree Chakravarti, the author of *A Healer's Journey*, accepted Swamiji's invitation to reside at the Ashram and begin her five-week book promotion tour in Portland.

Our special connection to Sree began back in 1991 when Swamiji visited her in New Delhi and learned

that she was writing a book about her life as a healer. He immediately invited her to have her book edited and published by Rudra Press, and there began a collaboration which has resulted in both a wonderful friendship and a beautiful book.

Background

Sree Chakravarti discovered her gift of healing over thirty years ago after the death of her beloved father and a prolonged illness of her own. She had always been drawn to touch sick people, but it was her association with a healing clinic, a place she had gone in search of her own cure, that gave her the opportunity to actually begin her own practice. The clinic invited Sree to join the staff and she quickly discovered that her right hand had a life of its own, seemed to know where the cause of disease lay, and could relieve symptoms and even cure people's ailments.

She began seeing patients in the modest home she shared with her husband, a colonel in the Indian army. From the very beginning she steadfastly refused to receive payment of any kind for her services. Sree has always believed that her healing gift is God-given and that to accept any reward would not only be wrong, but could possibly diminish her abilities. After her husband's retirement from the military, they continued their simple lifestyle, making do with his army pension.

As word of Sree's gift spread, she found herself working on increasingly complex and varied cases as well as getting invitations to work in foreign countries. With time and his own healing through his wife's hand, Colonel Chakravarti was able to drop his initial skepticism and give Sree the outright support and encouragement she longed for. With his blessing, she began travelling to international conferences and to the Middle East where she was invited to heal members of several royal families and heads of state.

Increasingly, Sree found herself working

with doctors who had been converted by the remarkable integrity and accuracy of the diagnostic and healing power passing through her right hand. Today, Delhi's best medical doctors often send their problem patients to Sree asking her to clarify a diagnosis; many of her patients are themselves doctors and their families.

Across the years Sree has discovered certain ailments that her gift is particularly effective in treating. While she tries to focus her time and energy on cases that she knows she can help, she is also open to new and unexplored illnesses. She never knows beforehand if she can help a person as each healing session depends entirely on whether her hand vibrates on her patient.

Portland Visit

During her September visit to Portland, Sree quickly became a familiar presence in the Ashram. She frequently joined us for evening class and dinner, and could often be found in the third floor kitchen taking her morning tea or lunch. She also agreed to give treatments to a small number of Institute members with serious health problems or those she felt drawn to treat.

Sree participated in seven different events during her stay with us, including a presentation at the Nityananda Institute, a radio interview, a meeting with Portland health professionals, and four book signings where she answered questions and demonstrated her healing method.

Public Programs

Each of Sree's public programs has its own special quality and content, although she always begins with a powerful reading of one of Rabindranath Tagore's poems from his Nobel Prize winning book, *Gitanjali*. At the end of the reading she presses the little book to her head and heart, and stands quietly for a few moments before inviting the audience to begin asking her questions.

Although Sree claims not to be a public speaker and has made very few such appearances in the past, her ability to talk directly and simply from the heart is truly disarming. It is usually only a matter of minutes before she has the audience totally enchanted with her descriptions of her naughtiness as a young girl, or her David and Goliath encounters with doctors and government dignitaries.

Sree is particularly adverse to wealthy and powerful people trying to impress their way into her treatment room. She once kept a Middle Eastern head of state waiting while she finished a treatment on one of his subjects. She challenged the man in power to prove to her that his blood and the blood of his subject were any different. Victorious, she then horrified the minister's attendants by ordering their sovereign back out to the waiting area. As she tells these stories her diminutive physical appearance seems to grow in stature and her dark eyes flash with intensity.

During the course of these question and answer sessions, Sree frequently weaves other issues into her responses. She speaks passionately about Western materialism, the loss of commitment and love in marriages and between parents and children, and the ravages of tension and greed in our lives. Her own clear grounding in love and understanding add tremendous power to her message by contrast alone. Here is someone who irrefutably lives and breathes simplicity, devotion to God, and surrender to a life of selfless service to others.

As Sree asks for volunteers for a demonstration healing, hands fly up all around the room. Someone is picked out, often at random, and comes forward to the treatment table. Sree, who has gone into high gear, shoots off a series of questions: "What are your symptoms?" "Has there been a medical diagnosis?" "Where does it hurt?" "Ok, lie down, lie down!" She asks the person to remove shoes and belt and lie on either their front or back depending on how they've responded to her queries. This

questioning is simply a shortcut for Sree, whose hand would find the trouble spot like a divining rod in any case.

Once the person is prone, Sree takes a brief, all but invisible pause to empty herself, draws a number of deep breaths, and begins to pass her hand several inches over the body of the volunteer. Suddenly the hand hovers and starts to vibrate and shake as if connected by some magnetic force within the body beneath her hand. Sree's fingers move onto the trouble spot and continue to vibrate intensely.

When people ask Sree what she experiences during these sessions, she replies, "Nothing!" She explains that her hand starts dancing on its own and that the vibration is like a dose of medicine for that particular patient. She herself does not know how long the treatment will last, and if for some reason she has to interrupt a session, she experiences discomforting pressure in her heart. She is simply the vehicle for this mysterious healing energy; as she puts it, "I am the glass, not the water."

From the audience's perspective, there may be nothing out of the ordinary about the movements of Sree's hand, but for the patient there is more going on than its gross physical shaking. There is a subtler, electrical pulse coming out of her fingertips which penetrates deep into the body if the problem is deep, or hovers at the surface in the case of a superficial wound. Some people experience heat, others say it feels as if she is holding an ice cube in her hand. Although there may be initial discomfort at the site of the problem, everyone she treats reports that the vibration is soothing and relaxing.

Seeing Sree work on a series of demonstration cases reveals the astonishing accuracy of the diagnostic power. Her hand may not vibrate over the area of pain the volunteer experiences; instead, it may descend on the root cause of that pain, the kidneys, the liver, an undiagnosed ulcer, an old head injury. As she says, "It is as if my fingers have eyes." It is mysterious and moving to see her hand

discover a painful source point that even the volunteer hadn't previously experienced.

During these demonstrations, Sree works for only a few minutes on each person. After her hand has diagnosed the problem and worked over that area for a couple of minutes, it glides to the pressure point in the

healing process. "Make it hurt!" she instructs with great force. She may also prescribe a change in diet, special hand mudras, and herbal or ayurvedic supplements.

At the end of these short demonstration treatments, Sree asks the volunteers to get up and see how they feel. Even with only a few minutes of her touch, people report feeling less pain, or more flexibility, or marked relief from whatever their state was before she began working on them.

The majority of people who come to Sree have some kind of undiagnosed back or neck pain, and she finds over and over again that the problem is actually with their kidneys. As her hand begins to work over the lower back, people are amazed to discover their kidneys — not only where they are, but that they feel hard and tender under her fingers. As Sree feels the extent of hardness beneath her fingers, a pained expression passes over her face. "Not enough water, not enough water! How much do you drink?"

Without fail, Sree will insist that the individual drink more plain water, at least eight tall glasses of water daily. When people point out that they drink plenty of juice and tea or coffee she shakes her head emphatically and asks them if they take showers or wash their clothes in juice or tea. "Your insides need cleansing with pure water. Drink! Drink!"

On Sree's last class day at the ashram, she asked Swamiji if she might read a parting poem to everyone at the end of meditation. After Swamiji's talk, he motioned to Sree with his hand and invited her to sit next to him on the teaching stand. They sat together side by side, the delicate Bengali lady with the long white hair and a brightly flowered sari, and our powerfully built American Swami — two contrasting worlds wonderfully merged in love and friendship. Sree's reading, strong and vivid, filled the room and everyone's heart.

Joan Ames

❖

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.

❖

Rabindranath Tagore*

foot that corresponds to the organ or area of the body that is under stress. Her fingers work powerfully on the feet, causing grimaces and howls of pain from her victim. Sree laughs like a delighted child, "I particularly love to give pain to medical doctors!" she says.

Sree then instructs the volunteer to rub the painful pressure point in the foot for only five seconds twice daily to continue the self-

